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SUBJECT: FORMER PRESIDENT KIM YOUNG-SAM AFFIRMS KOREA'S NK
POLICY; WARNS OF POLITICAL STORM OVER SEJONG CITY

Classified By: Ambassador Kathleen Stephens. Reasons 1.4 (b), (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Former President Kim Young-sam, in a September 24 lunch with the Ambassador, said President Lee Myung-bak's insistence on reciprocity in South-North relations was correct and that we should be prepared for every possibility as the DPRK navigates a difficult power transition. Kim said President Lee's effort to curtail the plan initiated by former President Roh Moo-hyun to relocate much of Korea's central government to Sejong City, outside Daejeon, could develop into a major political storm if not managed well. Constitutional reform is needed, but Kim does not see it happening during Lee's term because there is no consensus on the best division of executive and legislative powers for Korea, though Kim favors a U.S. model as opposed to a parliamentary model. End Summary.

LMB on the Right Track with NK

¶2. (C) Former President Kim Young-sam, in a September 24 lunch with the Ambassador, said President Lee's approach to North Korea and his insistence on reciprocity was correct. Kim said when he was President he gave rice to North Korea and the North's only response was to ask for more. We should demand something in return, he said. In the meantime, Kim said it would be difficult for Kim Jong-il to transfer power to one of his sons, and we must, therefore, be prepared for every possibility.

¶3. (C) Kim said we should not look to the Chinese for much help on North Korea. He recounted a summit meeting he had with then-President Jiang Zemin in Seoul when Jiang feigned ignorance of the situation in North Korea, insisting that South Korea knew more about the DPRK than China did. While Kim thought Jiang knew more than he was letting on, Kim emphasized that China does not have as much influence in North Korea as we think.

Sejong City a Looming Storm

¶4. (C) Kim said the controversy over moving much of the central government to Sejong City in Chungcheong Province was a looming domestic political storm for President Lee. Former President Roh Moo-hyun, in the 2002 presidential campaign, proposed moving much of the central government to a new city 150 kilometers south of Seoul, outside Daejeon. Legislation to enact Roh's plan was passed in 2005, but has since been revised 32 times. Opponents of the plan say it is not economically feasible to relocate and sustain much of the central government so far from Seoul. But the politically important region of Chungcheong supports the plan, and it is

difficult to imagine a scenario for winning the presidency without carrying Chungcheong -- which, opponents say, is why Roh proposed the plan in the 2002 campaign.

15. (C) National Assembly member Kim Moo-sung, who accompanied President Kim, observed that President Lee's nominee for Prime Minister, Chung Un-chan is a Chungcheong native who opposes the move to Sejong. Lee may have chosen Chung to lead the fight in substantially revising the Sejong relocation plan. A majority of members in the President's Grand National Party (GNP) also oppose the plan. But GNP member and presidential contender Park Geun-hye supports the relocation and is counting on carrying Chungcheong Province to win the presidency in 2012.

16. (C) Kim Moo-sung continued that a possible compromise on Sejong might see moving one ministry, Education, Science, and Technology, along with Seoul National University's science department and other science and technology related ventures to Sejong to create a science and technology hub. If Prime Minister Nominee Chung Un-chan can broker a successful compromise, he would be in a strong position to challenge Park Geun-hye for leadership of the GNP.

Constitutional Reform Need but Unlikely

17. (C) Former President Kim supported the idea of revising Korea's constitution to make it more like that of the United States. But, he said, revisions were unlikely during President Lee's term because there was not a consensus on how power should be balanced between the executive and

legislative branches. When Kim was a pro-democracy activist in the 1980's he favored a parliamentary system with a weak executive. Now, he said, he had come to the conclusion that a parliamentary system would not work in Korea and the country needed a strong executive.

STEPHENS